

Extension Watershed Stewardship

Ever-increasing urbanization coupled with the many impacts imposed by a growing population are challenging the integrity of Puget Sound-area watersheds. These impacts include reduced habitat quantity and quality for wildlife, degraded water quality in our streams and rivers, and reduced natural functioning of valuable landscape features such as groundwater recharge by wetlands. Agency personnel actions and regulations alone will not



solve these challenges; therefore, there is a need for **increased involvement by citizens in educating the community**. In an effort to meet this need, WSU King County Extension began the Watershed Stewardship (known then as Land/Water Stewardship) volunteer training program in 1990. This program is designed to educate, inspire, empower, and support citizens in their efforts to provide information and leadership in their communities to protect local watersheds.

Program Goals:

- Increase public awareness of the value of healthy watersheds and natural systems.
- Support citizen volunteers in their efforts to bring natural resource information to their communities.
- Educate, train, and empower stewards as community leaders and educators.

The Watershed Stewardship program was created to promote a stewardship ethic towards our land and water resources among rural and urban residents of King County. The first Watershed Stewardship Volunteer Training was held in 1990 and was designed to educate and provide tools to volunteers who were then able to reach out to their communities with a message of stewardship. Since that time, in addition to several short-courses and public conferences, the volunteer training has continued each year and has resulted in an ever-growing group of skilled volunteer educators promoting stewardship and providing leadership in King County.



Stewards-in-training visit Shadow Lake Bog to learn about this unique wetland type.
Photo T. Zimmerman



Extension Watershed Stewards lead a stormwater activity by making storm sounds with youth.
Photo B. Alford

Success!

- Steady growth over 15-year program tenure
- Nearly 300 Extension Watershed Stewards trained
- Stewards have volunteered over 30,000 hours at a current market value of over \$500,000
- Projects have reached all areas of King County

So far this year nearly 300 hours have been logged by Stewards. These efforts reached more than 350 members of the public in King County. Projects and activities that volunteers have been involved in range from organizing an Earth Day public education booth to developing and teaching recycling games for camp use. Some volunteers prefer to work with adults, while others enjoy children's education. Some are skilled public educators, others organize work parties, and still others prefer to contribute by writing articles and brochures. Each volunteer brings his or her own skills and creativity to the program; volunteer projects are limited only by imagination.

Empowering volunteers to bring natural resource information to the public

In 2005, 9 new stewards took part in the nine-week training, which focused on connections between urban, rural, and wild landscapes King County. Highlights included:

- a day-long Cedar River Watershed Tour;
- a wetland field trip to Soos Creek and Shadow Lake Bog;
- a tour of a low impact development (LID) demonstration neighborhood in Seattle;
- a walking trip to view the Black River heron rookery; and
- presentations from local experts in many fields including volunteer management, water regulations and laws, education, project management, and numerous natural resource fields.

Again, as in past years, the stewards-in-training found the course inspirational and invaluable. Here are some of their comments about the training:



Class of 2005 Extension Watershed Stewards

Photo B. Gaolach

"I think this program is very effective for bringing in citizens with a variety of backgrounds to learn leadership methods on watershed topics. Thank you!"

"I truly enjoyed meeting the speakers who were very accessible during and after the programs. Great for networking for our upcoming projects."

"This course was excellent. I would happily take it again just to absorb more information!"

-Comments from 2005 training graduates

Extension Watershed Stewards are active in their communities in a wide variety of ways. By enrolling in the program, they agree to volunteer a minimum of 60 hours of their time in the year following the training course as **educators and leaders** spreading the word about watershed stewardship. Many volunteers go well beyond this requirement by exceeding the number of hours and by remaining active stewards in subsequent years. To encourage this life-long stewardship ethic, last year we added a continuing education component to the program, which allows stewards to refresh and update their knowledge with periodic education opportunities. The program has also implemented an online reporting system that allows volunteers to report their hours electronically directly into a volunteer database. This will simplify the reporting process, allow volunteers to track their own progress, and provide up to date volunteer data to the program staff.

For more information about the Extension Watershed Stewardship program, please visit our website at <http://www.metrokc.gov/wsucce/Land&Water/index.htm>, or call 206-205-3171.

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Stewards-in-training learn about stream restoration on a field trip in Issaquah.

Photo P. Racette